

24/6

A Weekly Lenten Devotional



FPC HOUSTON

Weekly Devotional

TOPIC

SCRIPTURE

Week One: Stop

Genesis 1:26-2:3
Matthew 11:28-30

Week Two: Rest

Exodus 16: 1-30

Week Three: Remember

Exodus 20:8-11

Week Four: Observe

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Week Five: Heal

Mark 2:18-3:6

EXPERIENCING THE EASY YOKE OF JESUS DURING

Lent

“Sabbath is a deliberate act of interference, an interruption of our work each week, a decree of no-work so that we are able to notice, to attend, to listen, to assimilate this comprehensive and majestic work of God, to orient our work in the work of God.” -Eugene Peterson

In our current world there is much to cause us distress and heartache. It only takes a few glimpses on social media or at the latest news to feel burdened by the sadness and ugliness of the world. Sabbath is vital not just to our surviving but to our thriving. As Pastor John Mark Comer writes “In ugly times, we need the Sabbath to keep our hearts alive to the beauty of God and life with him in his world.”

This Lent, let's discover what it means to stop, rest, remember, observe, and heal through the sacred practice of Sabbath.

Week 1

MARCH 9 | STOP

GATHER

As you begin, **pray**.

Read God's holy word.

- **Genesis 1:26-2:3, Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)**

An Invitation to Stop

We live in a world that tells us to keep going, no rest for the weary, carry on, never quit, don't give up, achieve more. We correlate success with busyness and our calendar's fullness is directly related to our importance. Is it because we're scared of stopping? God offers you a kind of rest that no one else will. Our first step towards experiencing true Sabbath is to stop.

EQUIP

Take a pause and then consider the questions below.

"By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work." -Genesis 2:2 (NIV)

- How do you identify when your work is finished?
- What is your response to the invitation to "stop"?
- In your own words think about what the word "Sabbath" means to you.
- What do you identify as the difference between working *for* Sabbath and working *from* Sabbath?
- Take a moment to reflect on how you used your time this week. What life priorities would your hour-by-hour calendar this week reveal?

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

-Matthew 11:28 (NIV)

- What weariness or burdens are you carrying for yourself or others?
- When seeking rest, what practices or behaviors have you used that have been unsuccessful?
- How can you let God take care of you this week?
- What is stopping you from stopping?
- Describe a time when you felt a burden lifted from you.
- How would you define or describe “soul rest”? How does it differ from body or mind rest?
- What do you think Jesus is referring to when he speaks of “easy yoke” and “light burden”?
- The reality of God’s burden being light is a hard concept to grasp. We are so accustomed to the word burden implying heavy. How can you re-orient yourself to Jesus’ concept of an easy yoke and a light burden to experience God’s rest?

ENGAGE

Consider these next steps for the week ahead.

- Schedule time this week (an hour or several) where nothing is planned. Allow yourself to settle in both mind and body to complete presence in the moment. “We need this kind of complete cessation from activity occasionally or even our supposed time off will just be another form of tiring exertion.” -Tim Keller
- Be patient with yourself. For many of us it’s no easy task to still our minds and slow down. Consider practicing a simple breath prayer. Breathe in and say “Be still and know,” then breathe out and say “God is with me.” Try repeating this three times as you take pause and enter intentional rest.
- If you typically set goals or make lists for the week, consider limiting the amount of goals or tasks you set for yourself this week.
- Sabbath is really about taking things out of your life, not adding them in. Look ahead to your week and pick one thing that you could cut out of your schedule.

Close in Prayer

God of all creation, thank you for creating me in Your image and giving me the best example of Sabbath. May I imitate your rhythm of work and rest, stopping this week—both my body and mind—so that I may rest. Amen.

Week 2

MARCH 16 | REST

GATHER

As you begin, **pray**.

Read God's holy word.

- Exodus 16:1-30 (NIV)

An Invitation to Rest

Do you ever feel like you are a part of a whole community grumbling? Or maybe you are the one that people are grumbling against? Either way, dissatisfaction in life is real. Further, many of us hold expectations of being able to fix our “problems.” In American culture, we can plan, execute, solve, and sway our challenges and difficulties into submission—or so we think. But, what we learn from this Exodus story is a deeper truth about trust. The Israelites (like us) need to relinquish their control and trust God to provide for them. The Israelites (like us) need to stop and rest in God and His promises and provision.

EQUIP

Take a pause and then consider the questions below.

“However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them.” -Exodus 16:20 (NIV)

- Whom do you relate most to in this passage? The Israelites or Moses? Why?
- Can you reflect on a time when you, like the Israelites, tried to take care of every detail and it didn't go how you anticipated?
- What can we learn from the Israelites behavior? And Moses' response?

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out.’ So the people rested on the seventh day.” -Exodus 16:28-30 (NIV)

- What prompted the people's grumbling in this story?
- How is Israel being tested in this story?
- Do you regard Sabbath as a gift or a requirement?
- How can you let God take care of you this week?
- What does rest look like in your life right now?
- In what areas of your life is God asking you to trust Him more?
- How can you decide appropriate limits for your work and rest?

ENGAGE

Consider these next steps for the week ahead.

- “There is no formation without repetition.” -John Mark Comer. Consider practicing something from last week again this week.
- Evaluate the current patterns in your life. Do they allow you time to stop thinking about work? Consider setting some limits in your work life or in your thought life to intentionally clear your mind of thoughts related to your vocation.
- Shift your thinking this week by thinking of and preparing for the Sabbath all week long. Take note of how it changes your understanding of the other six days as you anticipate that day of rest.

Close in Prayer

God, thank you for your provision both for the Israelites and for me. Help me to trust you more and rest in You alone, knowing that You alone offer me rest that no one else can. As I continue to ponder and reflect on the Sabbath, may Sabbath be on my mind for the other six days this week. Amen.

Week 3

MARCH 23 | REMEMBER

GATHER

As you begin, **pray**.

Read God's holy word.

- Exodus 20:8-11 (NIV)

An Invitation to Remember

"Sabbath is the most frequently reiterated commandment of all 613 commandments in the Bible." -Ellen F. Davis. It is very clear that this is not merely a suggestion to make our life better, but rather a demand that we break free from constant busyness in order that we might experience freedom, rest, and a deeper connection with our Creator. Unfortunately, our tendency is to dive deeper into work and distraction instead. The majority of us feel overworked, overwhelmed, or overly tired. In this case, rules were NOT meant to be broken. If we keep the commandment of Sabbath, we will have more of what we really need in our lives—true rest.

EQUIP

Take a pause and then consider the questions below.

"Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God." -Exodus 20:9-10 (NIV)

- What or who is currently defining your work and your rest? Is it God, or someone or something else?
- What has made you hesitant or resistant to entering into a practice of Sabbath?
- Think about ways that you struggle to honor or remember the Sabbath.

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” -Exodus 20:8 (NIV)

- Why is it so easy for us to leave this particular commandment behind?
- Are there practical ways for remembering the Sabbath that have worked well for you?
- Do you agree or disagree that “remembering the Sabbath” is a commandment that we should still be following today? Why?
- How would you define Sabbath?
- What changed about the Jewish Sabbath when Jesus appeared?
- What did Jesus have to say about the Sabbath?

ENGAGE

Consider these next steps for the week ahead.

- “There is no formation without repetition.” -John Mark Comer. Consider practicing something from last week again this week.
- Consider beginning and ending your Sabbath in the same way each week or each time you practice. Start and end your Sabbath time with a prayer. Try not to plan out exactly how your time will go, but rather stay open to where God leads.
- Practice avocation during your Sabbath. “An avocation is something that is pleasurable for you, but that takes some skill and expertise. Usually it is something that others do for a living. This could be a sport, but it also could be anything from carpentry to music. This is somewhat analogous to planting a different crop in a field one year in order to replenish nutrients and make the land more fertile for its ordinary produce.” -Tim Keller

Close in Prayer

Ruler of All Creation, forgive me for the ways that I resist your commands. Help me remember the Sabbath this week and honor You in doing so. Holy Spirit, lead me as I intentionally engage with this spiritual practice this week. God of grace and mercy, thank you that you love me and welcome me no matter my failures or shortcomings. Open my mind and heart that I might experience your true freedom, connection, and love this week. Amen.

Week 4

MARCH 30 | OBSERVE

GATHER

As you begin, **pray**.

Read God's holy word.

- Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (NIV)

An Invitation to Observe

You might think after reading through this passage that it's a little hard to relate to. Are you even completely sure what an ox looks like? But, even if the descriptions may look different today, the message is still the same: no work for anyone. The Sabbath is to be observed by everyone from maintenance worker to CEO. It applies to all tools and resources being used as well. In Deuteronomy that's an ox, donkey, or any animal whereas today we might go as far as to say "cell phone, laptop, iPad, or any of your tech devices."

EQUIP

Take a pause and then consider the questions below.

"...but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. -Deuteronomy 5:14 (NIV)

- How do you introduce yourself when you meet someone for the first time?

- How can observing the Sabbath help shift your identity away from what you do or what you've done and towards who you are?
- Has your perspective on "Sabbath" changed over time? How or how not?
- Sabbath is a remembrance and a resistance. Think about one or two things that you are resisting in your life right now.
- Who in your life is overworked or oppressed?
- What is the difference between remembrance and observation?
- How can you go beyond remembering the Sabbath to observing the Sabbath this week?

ENGAGE

Consider these next steps for the week ahead.

- "There is no formation without repetition." -John Mark Comer. Consider practicing something from last week again this week.
- Journal about how you feel your spiritual practice of Sabbath is going. Offer a prayer to God in honesty and sincerity, trusting that he's with you no matter where you find yourself.
- Practice contemplation. "Prayer, solitude, journaling, reading and reflection are all ways that we replenish our inward resting in Christ and his work alone for our salvation. Hebrews 4:1-10 draws a remarkable analogy between the gospel of free grace and the Sabbath. The writer says, 'there remains, then, a rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work just as God rested from his.' (v.9) When we find salvation through Christ and grace, we rest from the most debilitating work of all—the work of establishing our own worth through our efforts, the work of earning our own salvation." -Tim Keller

Close in Prayer

God, thank you for being the same yesterday, today, and forever. Even as the world around me is in constant motion, commotion, and change, you remain the same. It feels hard at times to relate to Your word, but I know that there is truth for me in it. I may not be able to envision what it was like for the Israelites to cease working and I need your help so that I can apply it to my life today. Lord, let me be faithful to take the next step towards You as I observe the Sabbath. Amen.

Week 5

APRIL 6 | HEAL

GATHER

As you begin, **pray**.

Read God's holy word.

- **Mark 2:18-3:6 (NIV)**

An Invitation to Healing

You don't have to be a social psychologist to identify the tension between the Pharisees and Jesus in this passage. The Pharisees want people to follow the rules. Jesus says something different, reminding us that "Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Jesus didn't overlook the physical or spiritual needs of his followers to abide by Sabbath. Instead, He reminds them that He is "Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28). Salvation and ultimate rest can only be found in Him.

"Sabbath is the time set aside to do nothing so that we can receive everything, to set aside our anxious attempts to make ourselves useful, to set aside our tense restlessness, to set aside our media-satiated boredom. Sabbath is the time to receive silence and let it deepen into gratitude, to receive quiet into which forgotten faces and voices unobtrusively make themselves present, to receive the days of the just completed week and absorb the wonder and miracle still reverberating from each one, to receive our Lord's amazing grace." –Eugene Peterson

EQUIP

Take a pause and then consider the questions below.

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” -Mark 2:27-28 (NIV)

- What do you think Jesus means when he says “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath”?
- In this passage, Jesus calls himself the Lord of Sabbath (the Lord of rest). How have you experienced God’s rest in your life this week?
- What patterns or perceptions do you have in your day-to-day life that make it difficult for you to stop working (or thinking of work) and practice Sabbath?
- Sabbath can function as a God-given guardrail to keep us away from a mindset of greed or idolatry. Have you personally experienced this guardrail in your life? If so, think about how it’s made you feel.
- Do you think taking a day of rest would change you or heal you from some of the brokenness you’re experiencing? Why or why not?

“Then Jesus asked them, ‘Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’ But they remained silent.” -Mark 3:4 (NIV)

- The Bible commands us to honor the Sabbath, but it does not instruct us *how* to honor the Sabbath. Do you feel the freedom to practice Sabbath in your own creative way?
- What are some ways that you have creatively practiced Sabbath in your life recently?
- What would you say is the difference between enjoying a weekend and keeping Sabbath?


ENGAGE

Consider these next steps for the week ahead.

- “There is no formation without repetition.” -John Mark Comer. Consider practicing something from last week again this week.
- The more you give, the more you get. Take time to check in with yourself about your spiritual practice of Sabbath. After an honest look, take another step and commit to engage more deeply in the practice. Trust God’s transformative work in your life as you open yourself up to more dedicated time in Sabbath.

Close in Prayer

Jesus, you know my needs—all of them. Thank you for the ways you care for me. I know that your command for Sabbath was not meant to tie me down or require an unrealistic devotion to a rule. My devotion is to be to You. Thank you for the gift of Sabbath. May I take all that I've learned here into my daily life. Help me close the gap between knowledge and action—that as I practice Sabbath, I become a person who stops, rests, remembers, observes, and am healed through your ultimate grace. Amen.



We hope that this five-week study has offered you some insight into Scripture and God's teachings regarding Sabbath. We hope you gained some insight into your own life so that you might take the steps to experience rest in Jesus.

Remember to trust the process. God's transformative work in your life won't happen instantly. He is with you whether you are overworked, underappreciated, discouraged, or starting again.

For more resources,
visit **fpchouston.org/lent**.



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